

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Baptism and Confirmation**  
**Bishop's – The Diocesan College**  
**14 September 2008**

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The readings of the day: Rom 14:5-12  
Matt 18:21-35 (these will be read from the Good News Bible)

May I speak in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who calls us to share in the joyful life of worship, witness and service.

The service of Baptism and Confirmation is a wonderful occasion for saying 'yes'.

Yes, we say to God. Yes, I hear your call. Yes, I choose to respond. Yes, I will pledge my life to follow you.

But, rather more important, God says yes to us.

He says Yes, it is you I love. Yes, it is you I invite to be my child. Yes, I want you to live so I can be with you; and help you; and direct and guide you; and support you, in all that life will bring you.

In other words, God says 'I want you to have the best possible life – come and share it with me!'

So we say yes to this invitation. And we find that God has a further yes in store for us.

This is the gift of his Holy Spirit – his presence, his power, which comes to rest within all who become children of God.

Because God knows that, however strong our desire to live life his way, however firm the promises we make always to think and say and do the right thing, we are going to need his help – and it is the Holy Spirit who will supply it.

God's promise is this – life may not always be easy, and sometimes it may be very hard indeed, but, he says 'By my Spirit, I will be with you through thick and thin; I will never leave you; and I will never stop loving you; never stop affirming you; never stop helping you pick yourself up and dust yourself down, and take a deep breath, and start going forward again.'

I am glad to say that South Africa is doing far, far, better in the Paralympics than we did in the Olympics.

One thing that has struck me, is how many of the athletes pay tribute to the inspiration of their role models, and to the coaches who have trained them, and say 'I could not have done it without them.'

This has a lot of parallels with the Christian life.

First of all, God the Father picks us for his team. Then Jesus is our role model for how human life can best be lived. And then the Holy Spirit is with us, encouraging us, mentoring us, helping us to get it right, and cheering us all the way.

Sometimes we have the wrong picture of God – we think of him as always ready to condemn us for the fact that we aren't 100% perfect, 100% of the time. We are crushed and demoralised by feeling we will never be good enough.

When we read that every knee will bow before God, and that every one will have to give him an account of our lives – we wonder whether this God is a bit of a tyrant, and whether he deserves our love.

But this fails to take account of the picture of God that is painted elsewhere in the Bible!

Our Gospel reading speaks of a God who is far, far, far more generous and loving towards us than we can ever imagine.

He promises to forgive us, when and whenever we fall short; and he certainly does not keep count of how often it happens. He says, I forgive you, I'm beside you, just hang on in there, stick with me, and we'll get through this together.

I think that when we come to give an account of ourselves before God, it will be like the Olympics, a celebration of our personal bests in life. That's what God is most interested in

And when our knees bow, it will be in joy – like the athletes on the podium who bow their heads so they can receive their medals. We who are God's children, who are 'on his team', will bow in thanks and celebration that everything we value in life, 'we could not have done it without him'.

In God's eyes, we are all medal winners – if we choose to walk his ways, run his race. He will cheer us all the way to the finishing line, and we will get the medal!

Nowadays, you can get a coach not only for sports. You can even hire a so-called 'Life Coach', for the whole of life!

Well, God's Holy Spirit is the best possible life coach there could be.

He helps us get life right: the life of worship, witness and service, which, as our service today tells us, is the heart of being a Christian. Let me say something about these three.

*[YOUR GRACE – IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO REPLACE THIS NEXT SECTION WITH YOUR OWN USUAL WAY OF EXPLAINING HOW YOU UNDERSTAND WORSHIP, WITNESS AND SERVICE.]*

*So, first, worship. Worship is about building our relationship with God, which we do like building any other relationship – through spending quality time in each other's company. We do this in church and alone, through our services, in prayers, and reading the Bible; and sometimes it is just good to sit in silence, knowing you are in God's loving presence.*

*We can be honest with God, and talk to him about whatever is on our minds. Just look at the Psalms! The Psalmist is often angry with God, or complaining that God seems to have let him down. The Psalms encourage us to be honest with God.*

*As well as speaking, we also need to listen to what God has to say to us.*

*Sometimes, when I read my Bible quietly, alone, I feel as if a particular verse were written just for me at that very moment. It might be reassurance, it might be a challenge – God always knows exactly what I need to hear.*

*Sometimes God speaks to us in Church – a particular phrase from a sermon, or even a hymn, can strike us in the same way.*

*Sometimes as we pray alone we feel a conviction that God is trying to tell us something. The more we pray, the more we are able to hear and recognise that still small voice.*

*As with people, the more you spend time with God, the more you will become convinced of how much he loves you. And the more you will find yourself loving him. Ultimately, worship is about enjoying that love with God – accepting his love, and responding in gratitude with your own love.*

*Then there is witness. 'Witness' is a very churchy word. It does not mean anything as formal as speaking in a court of law.*

*Witnessing just means that what we say – and the way that we say it; and what we do – and the way that we do it, should let other people know that we follow Jesus: and declare that this is the best possible way for any human being to live!*

And then there is service.

Well, I don't think I need to say much about service, here at Bishops, which, in its outreach programme, and in its internal structures, has done so much in recent years to stress how those whom God has blessed must let that blessing overflow to others in generous attitudes and actions.

Let me return to my Olympic theme here – of Jesus as our inspiring role model and the Holy Spirit as our mentor and coach.

Models and mentors are what we most need in life, through all of worship, witness and service.

Neither encouragements nor threats, alone, draw out the best from us.

Every parent knows that!

God knows it too – neither the inspiring visions of the prophets, nor the rules of the Old Testament law, provided on their own what humanity most needed.

This is why he sent Jesus, as the role model we needed; and still sends his Holy Spirit to be our mentor.

Modelling and mentoring is even reflected in today's parable which Jesus told. The king models to his servant how the servant should deal with debts, he is prepared to be his mentor – but unfortunately the servant does not get the message, and does not follow the example he has been set, in his own dealings with others.

We should be models of the life which Jesus models for us.

And we should be mentors, helping others to find, and to grow in, the Christian life. We must allow the Holy Spirit, who coaches us, to help us coach others.

Modelling and mentoring is for the whole of life.

In this school, everyone is expected to learn how to live out, to model, the Christian ethos of Bishops. More than this, there is a deliberate policy by which staff mentor interns; and older pupils mentor younger ones.

In families too we need modelling and mentoring, by parents and guardians, of their children.

In work, those with experience should mentor newer employees – and this is especially true today, where many people have no prior experience of the sort of work environment into which they are now able to move.

And the whole world needs all of us as models and mentors of what it means to know and share the love of God the Father, shown in Jesus Christ, made real to us through the Holy Spirit.

My prayer for all of you who are being baptised and confirmed today is this: that you will know that love of God; and be inspired by Jesus to follow him; and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, grow as God's models and mentors to all you meet – or, to use the words of the service, that you will shine as his lights in the world, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.